

White House Watch Carter's Oversight

President Carter seems to have been singularly unprepared to deal with one of his most important responsibilities, the control and management of foreign intelligence procedures, when he took office. Ford White House assistants who knew from experience how tricky and troublesome this area of presidential concern could be urged incoming Carter assistants Hamilton Jordan, Jack Watson and Robert Lipshutz, among others, to pay serious attention to it and to have plans for handling it well in hand by inauguration day. Excepting the National Security Council, which in theory is at the top of the intelligence heap but in practice is part of the problem rather than the place for keeping the problem from becoming critical, the Carter people all but ignored the existing White House arrangements for watching the watchers on the President's behalf and had just about everything to learn about the subject after January 20. For example, they rejected advice that they establish close liaison during the post-election transition with the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board and the Intelligence Oversight Board, a tiny but vital control unit which the new President in March cited with relief and approval in support of his assertion that there had been nothing illegal or improper in secret CIA subsidies to officials of friendly foreign governments.

The *Washington Post's* disclosure that the CIA had spent millions of dollars in personal payoffs to King Hussein of Jordan over the whole of his reign and was still paying him \$750,000 a year appeared on the day that Secretary of State Cyrus Vance arrived in Amman to discuss moves toward a Middle East settlement with Hussein. President Carter and his press secretary, Jody Powell, avoided direct criticism of the *Post* and Powell went so far as to say that its reporter, Bob Woodward of Watergate fame, and its executive editor, Benjamin Bradlee, had behaved "very responsibly" in consulting with and forewarning the President before the story was published. Mr. Carter made his sense of outrage and frustration plain to congressmen with whom he discussed the report and with his statement on February 23 that "It can be extremely damaging to our relationship with other nations, to the potential security of our country even in peacetime, for these kind of operations, which are legitimate and proper, to be revealed." The *Post* gave the impression that the IOB had found the Hussein payments improper and that President Ford had ignored the finding in letting the payments continue. As clearly as he could without specifically confirming that Hussein had been paid, President Carter indicated that he'd reviewed the entire IOB and CIA record of these and similar payments and had found nothing wrong with them.

Nevertheless he stopped the payments to Hussein, presumably because continuing them after they were disclosed could only compound Hussein's embarrassment and any harm the revelation may have done him in the Arab world.

An incidental effect of the Hussein rumpus was to settle one of many doubts about what the new President intends to do with the White House supervisory setup that he inherited. His fourth reference in two press conferences to the IOB indicated that he expects to retain it as an entity, whether or not he keeps its present members: its chairman, retired and aging (at 82) career Ambassador Robert D. Murphy; former Secretary of the Army Stephen Ailes; and Leo Cherne, one of the country's leading business consultants and chairman of the Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board. He could hardly be planning to abolish a board of which he said on March 9: "And we've got a very good arrangement that was primarily set up by President Ford to prevent abuses. The Intelligence Oversight Board is made up of three distinguished men appointed by President Ford. They have complete access to any operation conducted by the intelligence forces."

The board's functions are to receive and review any complaints of illegal or improper intelligence agency behavior that may come to it, with emphasis upon complaints from officials or employees of intelligence agencies; to review agency guidelines and practices; to report its findings regularly to the President and the Attorney General; and to report immediately and directly to the President any finding or suspicion of illegality or impropriety. From what is known of the IOB's procedure since it and the elaborate system of executive oversight of which it is a part were established by presidential order 11905 on February 18, 1976, and from a few bits of information, one may deduce part of what happened in the Hussein affair.

Somebody at the CIA—it could have been the agency's general counsel or inspector general, or an individual employee—reported that Hussein payoffs to the IOB. It demanded and got all of the available and relevant CIA documentation. President Ford's tough executive order and his personal admonitions to all intelligence agency heads, in this case to Director George Bush, would have made it professionally suicidal for anyone to withhold anything. After reviewing the whole affair the board put its findings in a letter signed by Chairman Murphy and hand-delivered to Counsellor John Marsh, the assistant who oversaw all White House communication in intelligence matters with the agencies and with Congress. Marsh took the letter to Ford and they discussed it. Carter's statements affirm in effect that the board found nothing illegal or improper in the payments as such, though there is some indication that IOB thought the CIA wrongly withheld knowledge of the payments